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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PARAMARIBO 000140

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WHA/PDA FOR CHAD WEST; WHA/CAR FOR JROSHOLT; ECA FOR
BLAKENEY VASQUEZ, CAMILLE BARONE, PETER COZZENS, COLOMBIA
BARROSSE, SANDRA ROUSE, AND JILL STAGGS; POSTS FOR PAOS/CAOS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OPRC](#) [OEXC](#) [NS](#)

SUBJECT: TWO MONTHS, TEN EVENTS, FIFTEEN HUNDRED GUESTS:
BLACK HISTORY PUNCHES-UP IN SURINAME

REF: A. PARAMARIBO 88

[B](#). PARAMARIBO 117

[C](#). PARAMARIBO 132

[D](#). PARAMARIBO 136

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[1](#). (U) Summary: Drawing on a mix of ECA support, Post-identified "window of opportunity" speakers, and post-conceived programs, Post upped Black History Month programming from four events in 2007 to ten in 2008. Enthusiasm among local audiences helped carry Black History Month programming well into March. Attendance grew dramatically from 200 total guests in 2007 to approximately 1500 in 2008; while some of the events were large budget items, most were done virtually for free and with important co-sponsorship. In addition, Post was able to convey the message of Black History Month as a "multi-cultural" event rather than focusing on a single ethnic group. Extensive and very positive media coverage and word of mouth created a buzz which generated momentum throughout the 2008 events. END SUMMARY

[2](#). (U) Type of Program: Post tied the visit of Rhythm Road band The Kelley Johnson Quartet to Black History Month, and the band delivered two concerts, one workshop for children, and one private "jazz jam" (ref a). Surinamese drummer Gregory Kranenburg delivered a second workshop for Post, and Post was invited to tie Black History Month programming into a presentation of different drumming styles under Kranenburg's direction (ref d). Post's monthly movie night featured a Black History theme via the film, "Blackboard Jungle." Post held two Black History Month lectures, one on ethnomusicology (ref b) and one on maroons (the descendants of escaped slaves) in the U.S. (ref c). Finally, the Ambassador hosted a lunch for a multi-ethnic group of historians, journalists, actors, writers, politicians, and others from the cultural sector under the title "Black History Month: Diversity in Society."

[3](#). (U) Background: In 2007 Black History Month programming began slow and gained momentum: the first event drew fewer than 15 guests, but the fourth and final around 100. In 2008 Post built on this momentum to create a large slate of events which drew large attendance. The extension of Black History Month into March was unplanned, but given the window of opportunity speakers available and the continued interest by the public, Post was more than pleased to continue its programming. A newspaper reporter who was disappointed to come to the process late (he scheduled an interview for the day after the last event) decided to write an article anyway,

and his full-page, laudatory spread in the local paper-of-record formed a fitting cap to activities when it was published in late March.

¶4. (U) Evaluation of the Program: All jazz events were well attended, but the style of jazz offered was less consistent with Surinamese tastes than Post might have hoped (ref a). Hence, it was the grassroots, contact-building events later on -- many of them last-minute inventions -- which helped recreate the sense of Black History Month as a signature piece of Post's cultural programming. In particular, the lively drum workshops facilitated by local drummers (refs a, d) through Post sponsorship resulted in large and enthusiastic audiences, and the lecture on maroons (ref c) created a high-level close to the academic portions of the programming. The lecture excited the audience, many of whom were themselves descended from escaped slaves ("maroons"). Post has laid a firm foundation for future cultural programming that supports MSP goals of promoting mutual understanding and creating a more receptive environment for dialogue.

¶5. (U) Program Coordination: Post drew on a wide variety of sources. The Lincoln Center-coordinated Rhythm Road program provided four events (ref a), and inexpensive "window of opportunity" events facilitated through friends and contacts of Embassy personnel provided another four. The other two events were reworkings of regular Post activities, and were inexpensive events of less than \$200 apiece): the Ambassador's weekly soup/salad/sandwich lunch program, and Post's monthly "American Movie Night."

¶6. (U) Program Costs: Rhythm Road programming cost Post approximately \$11,500 and, for the second year in a row, ate up around half of Post's discretionary budget for the year. None of the other events exceeded \$300 in expenses, and though the audiences were smaller, the cost-benefit naturally favors "window of opportunity" events. Post will consider a

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slate of locally contracted artists for 2009, but also is aware that a high-profile event such as Rhythm Road is also useful as a standard-bearer.

¶7. (U) Impact of the Program: Most telling was the workings of word-of-mouth, and two events in March best demonstrate this. The lecture on descendants of escaped slaves was tied to a lunch at the Deputy Chief of Mission's house which unexpectedly attracted the First Lady of Suriname (ref c). Thus what started as a modest event for a few interested scholars became a high-profile happening. The final drum workshop demonstrated the value Surinamers put on Post programming. The event was not Post-generated; rather, the Cultural Center of Suriname invited Post to participate (ref d). This confirmed Post's sense that Black History Month programming has earned a place of prominence in the cultural events calendar in Suriname.

SCHREIBER HUGHES